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QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION IN ALL COUNTRIES OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS CONTAINED IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND IN THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, AND STUDY OF SPECIAL PROBLEMS WHICH THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FACE IN THEIR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE THESE HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING: PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE RIGHT TO ENJOY AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING; FOREIGN DEBT, ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT POLICIES AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE FULL ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND, IN PARTICULAR, ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Human rights and extreme poverty

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 1993/13 of 26 February 1993, entitled "Human rights and extreme poverty", the Commission on Human Rights endorsed resolution 1992/27 adopted by the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities on 27 August 1992 appointing Mr. Leandro Despouy as Special Rapporteur on the question of human rights and extreme poverty with responsibility for preparing a study on this issue.

2. In resolution 1993/13, the Commission on Human Rights invited the Special Rapporteur to give special attention to the following aspects:

(a) The effects of extreme poverty on the enjoyment and exercise of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of those affected by it;

(b) Efforts by the poorest themselves to exercise their rights and participate fully in the development of the society in which they live;

(c) Conditions in which the poorest can convey their experiences and ideas and become partners in the enjoyment of human rights;

(d) Means of promoting a better understanding of the experiences and ideas of the poorest and those committed to working alongside them.

3. In its resolution 1993/13, the Commission on Human Rights also invited the Secretary-General to report to the Commission at its fiftieth session on all the matters referred to in that resolution.

4. In pursuance of this resolution the Secretary-General sent a note verbale and questionnaire on behalf of the Special Rapporteur to States, specialized agencies, United Nations bodies and other international organizations, including non-governmental organizations, requesting them to assist the Special Rapporteur in the preparation of his progress report to be submitted to the Sub-Commission at its forty-sixth session, in 1994.

5. At its forty-fifth session, the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities considered the preliminary report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1993/16). In introducing his report, the Special Rapporteur noted that whereas the issue of extreme poverty had been traditionally addressed in terms of the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, in recent years human rights bodies had begun to see it as an independent issue to be considered in the wider context of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

6. The Special Rapporteur also stated that extreme poverty affected developed as well as developing countries and thus was a universal issue. He stressed the importance of improving knowledge of extreme poverty, its causes and its consequences for the enjoyment of human rights. He further considered the need to recognize the important contribution to devising policies to overcome poverty that could be found in the efforts deployed on a day-to-day basis by the poorest themselves to change their situation for the better.

7. The Special Rapporteur noted that in recent years the question of poverty had increasingly formed part of the concerns of the international community, as was apparent in the work of various national and international agencies and organizations, upon which knowledge the study would in part be concentrated.

8. During the consideration of the Special Rapporteur's preliminary report members of the Sub-Commission welcomed his report, and it was suggested, inter alia, that the Special Rapporteur consider in his next report making a specific analysis of the reasons for the concentration of wealth in small groups in every country, and examine national policies to tackle the problem of extreme poverty. Several creative efforts in empowering the poorest were cited and it was suggested that a comparative study of them might be undertaken.

9. Further, in response to General Assembly resolution 47/134 of 18 December 1992, various activities were organized to draw the attention of the international community to this problem, which is a violation of human dignity, and might, in some situations, constitute a threat to the right to life. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights participated in the

commemoration of the first International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 18 October 1993 at the Parvis des droits de l'homme, in Paris. There he delivered a speech, elucidating the ways in which the United Nations had tried to come to grips with the problem of extreme poverty. He noted that the number of people affected by poverty was growing, both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the world population. He also reiterated that the problem of extreme poverty tended to elude international and intergovernmental action and should not be seen as an exclusively economic problem. The Assistant Secretary-General stressed that to do justice to the complexity of the problem of poverty there was a need to make the human rights dimensions of poverty better known. The Special Rapporteur's study was an important step in that direction.

10. On 18 October 1993, on the occasion of the commemoration of the first International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva received a delegation of Swiss and French families living in poverty and of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, Geneva. The Director-General stressed the leading role that the International Movement ATD Fourth World had played in the recognition of the specific problems of the destitute. He reiterated that the primary purpose of the United Nations, which was to maintain peace and security, could be achieved only if faith in the dignity and worth of the human person was reaffirmed and social progress promoted, as was stated in the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations.